



**AMERICAN EXPRESS AND WORLD MONUMENTS FUND ANNOUNCE \$1 MILLION
AWARD FOR PRESERVATION EFFORTS AT SIX HISTORIC SITES
ON 2012 WORLD MONUMENTS WATCH**

Sites span the globe from Mexico to Japan

For Immediate Release—May 14, 2012. . . . Today, American Express and World Monuments Fund announced \$1 million in grant funding to six historic sites. This is the first allocation from a \$5 million, five-year grant to the World Monuments Fund to support the World Monuments Watch. Each of the six locations was among the at-risk historical sites included on the 2012 Watch list, announced in October 2011. American Express is founding sponsor of the Watch program.

The projects receiving funding are the Ruta de la Amistad in Mexico City, Mexico; Salvador de Bahia, Brazil; Balaji Ghat in Varanasi, India; the Canterbury Provincial Government buildings in Christchurch, New Zealand; the ruins of the former Cathedral of Saint Michael in Coventry, United Kingdom; and the town of Sawara in Japan.

“WMF is grateful to American Express for its longstanding commitment to the World Monuments Watch,” says Bonnie Burnham, President of World Monuments Fund. “Over the years, the company’s steadfast support has helped to preserve 138 sites in 62 countries, benefiting both the local populations and the many people from across the globe who visit them for their beauty and to learn about history and culture.”

“American Express remains committed to preserving and sustaining historic and culturally significant sites,” says Ed Gilligan, Vice Chairman of American Express. “These places serve to unite communities, and we are proud to play a role in ensuring that they continue to be enjoyed far into the future.”

Historic sites selected to receive grant funding include:

Balaji Ghat, Varanasi, India: Located on the banks of the Ganges River, Balaji Ghat dates from 1735 and is an important example of the buildings, called *ghats*, constructed along the Ganges to serve pilgrims worshipping at the holy river. There are 84 *ghats* in the holy city of Varanasi, one of the world’s oldest continuously inhabited cities and a major Hindu pilgrimage destination. Balaji Ghat, once the home of the Banaras Gharana music school, has suffered two collapses in recent years due to the combination of heavy visitation and lack of maintenance.

The American Express award will support the current plan for adaptive reuse of the building, transforming it into a cultural center for tourists and pilgrims, showcasing the history and heritage of the region. The initial phase of conservation will restore the first three floors of the building and provide new visitor amenities, along with exhibition installations and a performance space.

Canterbury Provincial Government Buildings, Christchurch, New Zealand: Built in the mid-nineteenth century, Canterbury Provincial Government Buildings have remained relatively

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unchanged through the twentieth century. The High Victorian Gothic Revival buildings were an important local destination and tourist attraction. The buildings were also used as an educational and event space until earthquakes in September 2010 and February 2011 reduced large sections of the buildings to rubble. Disaster-response efforts have understandably focused on the thousands of displaced Christchurch residents whose homes were severely damaged, as well as the rebuilding of critical infrastructure.

The American Express award will support efforts to restore salvaged artifacts and to promote the future rebuilding of the Canterbury Provincial Government Buildings, helping to ensure that the buildings' heritage lives on for generations to come.

Cathedral Church of St. Michael, Coventry, United Kingdom: More commonly known as Coventry Cathedral, the Cathedral Church of St. Michael was gutted by incendiary bombs during World War II. When a new cathedral was built, a decision was made to keep the shell of the old cathedral as a gathering place and reminder of the effects of war. Decades of exposure to the elements have deteriorated the medieval sandstone, necessitating a conservation program to ensure that the ruins endure.

The American Express award will support the development of a comprehensive management plan for the ruins. Structural stabilization and repair of the ruins will also be undertaken, along with the conservation of the medieval stained glass that was salvaged and stored during the war.

Ruta de la Amistad, Mexico City, Mexico: This series of specially commissioned outdoor sculptures was developed for the 1968 Olympic Games. Nineteen of the large-scale sculptures lined the 17-kilometer route, while three others were positioned outside of stadiums. The sculptures were created by contemporary artists from five continents. In the decades since its creation, the Ruta de la Amistad has become a major artery in Mexico City. Growth has obscured many of the artworks, and many have deteriorated from pollution and lack of maintenance, while construction of an elevated toll road along the route has necessitated the relocation of some of the sculptures. A major effort is underway to restore and relocate all of the sculptures as part of a new cultural corridor to highlight their significance and enable visitation.

The award will support conservation efforts, as well as the development of an interpretive program, including maps and signage, to support tourism.

Salvador de Bahia, Brazil: Founded in 1549, Salvador de Bahia was Brazil's first capital. Today, this modern-day metropolis of three million inhabitants contains a historic center (*Centro Histórico*) comprising a streetscape of colonial-era buildings housing some 80,000 residents. Since the 1970s, the social and physical condition of the *Centro Histórico* has deteriorated as a result of economic decline, increased crime, and decaying infrastructure.

The award will support efforts to install an interpretation center in the historic center devoted to the culture and heritage of Bahia.

Sawara, Japan: This picturesque, historic canal town in the Kantō region of Japan was included on the 2012 Watch along with other areas of eastern Japan affected by the devastating earthquake in March 2011. The town flourished during the Edo period (1603–1867) and is characterized by more than 300 historic examples of a distinctive style of Edo townhouse known as *machiya*, which functioned as both residence and workspace. More than a third of these were damaged by the disaster.

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The American Express award will support the conservation of seven of Sawara's most treasured *machiya*.

World Monuments Watch

Launched in 1996 and issued every two years, the World Monuments Watch calls international attention to threatened cultural-heritage sites around the world. Watch listing provides an opportunity for sites and their nominators to raise public awareness, foster local participation, advance innovation and collaboration, and demonstrate effective solutions. The process also serves as a vehicle for requesting World Monument Fund assistance for select projects.

American Express

American Express is a global services company, providing customers with access to products, insights, and experiences that enrich lives and build business success. Historic preservation has long been the hallmark of American Express's involvement in the community, reflecting the company's recognition of the importance of cultural sites and monuments as symbols of national and local identity, and the role that their preservation can play in attracting visitors and revitalizing neighborhoods. Learn more at americanexpress.com and connect with us on facebook.com/americanexpress, foursquare.com/americanexpress, linkedin.com/companies/american-express, twitter.com/americanexpress, and youtube.com/americanexpress.

World Monuments Fund

World Monuments Fund is the leading independent organization devoted to saving the world's most treasured places. For over 45 years, working in more than 90 countries, its highly skilled experts have applied proven and effective techniques to preserve important architectural and cultural heritage sites around the globe. Through partnerships with local communities, funders, and governments, WMF inspires an enduring commitment to stewardship for future generations. Headquartered in New York, WMF has offices and affiliates worldwide. www.wmf.org, twitter.com/worldmonuments, and facebook.com/worldmonuments.

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